

Making Healthy Communities

Public health, with the emphasis on *public*, encompasses but goes beyond the traditional medical emphasis on prevention, detection, and cure. “Public” suggests that the power to make health rests not only with a medical elite, but with people from all backgrounds and walks of life, both as individuals and as members of communities. It also suggests that public assets, such as education, work, housing, and transportation, enhance community life and well-being. Studies confirm that secure income, higher educational levels, quality housing, and social cohesion—areas in which medicine has traditionally had little input—translate into improved health. The quality of the public’s general health depends on the accessibility and quality of our public assets, the way that people live, work, learn, grow, struggle, and play together. This idea of interconnectedness among individuals, communities, and public assets forms the foundation of the Healthy Communities movement.

We are especially proud to depart from our usual format at *Public Health Reports* to devote this entire issue to the expanding Healthy Communities movement. Within these pages are articles on the history of the movement, resources and bibliographies, theoretical and practical guidance, and case studies describing the challenges and successes of Healthy Communities initiatives across the United States. Taken together, the articles draw from the movement’s past and present to point to a future in which the power to achieve better health—meaning better life for all—resides within the neighborhoods and communities of the US and around the world. Making healthy communities, as these articles show, requires interactions among a multitude of variables, but it all comes down to

this: individuals reaching across great divides of culture and understanding to listen to each other hard, respect each other well, and translate the meaning gained from these encounters into action for healthy change.

This issue is a departure in another respect. *Public Health Reports* is certainly not the first journal to publish scholarly articles on the Healthy Communities movement, but it may be the first to collect such varied articles on the subject within the covers of a single issue. As a phenomenon, Healthy Communities has focused most of its energies on action rather than study. Moreover, in its emphasis on partnerships and interconnection, Healthy Communities is not as amenable to traditional methods of research and quantification as are more typical public health topics. For these reasons, we decided not to impose the level of peer review scrutiny on these articles that we ordinarily would. We believe that this decision allows important subject matter to be introduced for the first time.

Two people deserve special recognition here. They are Len Duhl, of whom it is an understatement to say that, without him, there would be no Healthy Communities movement in the US, and Peter Lee, guest editor of this rich contribution to a field that we hope will come to represent a future direction of public health. In keeping with the movement’s principles of grassroots inclusiveness, we especially acknowledge the dedication of those professionals and laypeople who have devoted hours to discussion, research, and action in pursuit of a better life for themselves, their families, their neighborhoods, and their communities.

—Judith Kurland ■

